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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 33rd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 20 July 1992, at 3 p.m.

President:	Mr. MROZIEWICZ	(Poland)
later:	Mr. GUERRERO (Vice-President)	(Philippines)

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The meeting was called to order 3.20 p.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued) (E/1992/63, E/1992/90, E/1992/99)

REVITALIZATION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued) (E/1992/86, E/1992/101 and Corr.1)

ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW SUBSIDIARY BODIES OF THE COUNCIL (E/1992/76) (continued)

Mr. SARDENBERG (Brazil) asked what steps had been taken to reform the Global Environment Facility and to arrange for the pledging conference envisaged at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro.

Mr. MALONE (Canada) said that the proposed Commission on Sustainable Development should comprise no more than 54 members and should be established as soon as possible, preferably by the spring of 1993. As a subsidiary body of the Council, its decisions would be reviewed annually by the General Assembly. The tasks entrusted to the Commission should be pragmatic and achievable and there should be flexibility in setting its agenda to ensure that priority issues were covered and that all of Agenda 21 was examined over a period of, for example, five years.

Participation by non-governmental organizations and scientific input would be the key to the Commission's success. The Commission should examine global, regional and national efforts - the latter through reports from countries - to implement Agenda 21 and the problems and challenges faced in meeting the objectives established at Rio. There should be high-level political involvement in the Commission, and Government ministers should attend part of the annual sessions. Delegations and the Secretariat should work closely in the planning stages. The special task force established by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) would benefit from regular consultations with permanent representatives.

(Mr. Malone, Canada)

At its forty-seventh session the General Assembly should consider the following questions: composition and structure of the Commission, including the manner in which members and Chairman would be selected, role and status of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, and subsidiary bodies, if any. The General Assembly should also discuss the Commission's mandate; its agenda-setting methods; the leadership, composition and location of its secretariat and the Commission's relationship with United Nations agencies and their programmes as well as with negotiations on relevant international agreements. Lastly, the General Assembly should link the discussion of the Commission to the mandates and operations of the new subsidiary bodies of the Council.

Mr. MARKS (United States of America) said that the central purpose of the Commission was to provide an intergovernmental forum for the exchange of information on national and multilateral experiences in implementing the decisions adopted at Rio and for the discussion of global, regional and, where appropriate, national trends and key issues in the integration of environment and development. That process should include a review of the efforts of the United Nations system, particularly at the regional level, to implement Agenda 21. The contributions of international financial institutions, including the regional multilateral banks, should be encouraged to the maximum extent feasible. It was also important to ensure the active involvement of non-governmental organizations and the business and scientific communities.

Overall effectiveness and efficiency would be enhanced by the establishment of a separate unit within the Secretariat headed by a senior official, probably at the Assistant Secretary-General level. The unit should provide the support staff for the new Commission and whatever ACC coordinating mechanism was established. The location of the Commission and its support staff and its links to the rest of the United Nations system would be critical to the success of follow-up activities. The two realistic options for the Commission's headquarters were Geneva and New York.

Delegations to the Commission should comprise responsible policy makers and also senior technical experts. The Commission should give priority to

(Mr. Marks, United States)

information from States regarding their national experience in carrying out the recommendations of the Rio Conference. That process would be greatly facilitated by a well-focused agenda which addressed appropriate portions of Agenda 21 at each session, leading to sequential consideration of the entire outline for action over a period of perhaps five years.

Lastly, since the mandates of the new Commission on Science and Technology for Development, and of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development and the Committee on Natural Resources had been established prior to the decision to establish a Commission on Sustainable Development, they must be reviewed and approved, if indeed those bodies were to continue to exist at all. He invited the Secretary-General of the Conference to comment on the relationship between all those bodies on the overall question of environment and development.

Mr. MONGBE (Benin) said that it would not be appropriate for the Council to engage in a substantive discussion of the Commission on Sustainable Development; that task would fall to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session. With regard to paragraph 38.11 of Agenda 21, he inquired what interim secretariat arrangements had been made. He also wondered when delegations could expect to receive a report by the Secretary-General, regarding secretariat arrangements for the Commission.

Mr. MARTIN (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its Member States, asked about the nature and number of reports to be prepared as a follow-up to the Conference, particularly with respect to the Commission on Sustainable Development and expressed the hope that they would be ready sufficiently in advance for delegations to consider them thoroughly at the General Assembly.

Mr. STRONG (Secretary-General, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), replying to the various questions, said that it was his understanding that work was proceeding in accordance with the decisions adopted at Rio on the following issues of concern to developing countries regarding the reform of the Global Environment Facility: the universality of its membership and the terms on which membership was available; the transparency of its activities; the nature of its mandate; the

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extent to which its funding of measures provided for in international conventions involved it in final decisions on such measures; the extent to which activities other than those arising under international conventions might be eligible for Facility funding and the conditions for such opportunities; and the nature of the ongoing relationship between the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme.

As to the idea of a pledging conference, it would seem appropriate, in the light of the decisions adopted at Rio, for those countries which had made commitments at Rio to define them more specifically within the framework of a meeting along the lines of a pledging conference.

With regard to the relationship between the proposed new subsidiary bodies of the Council and the proposed Commission on Sustainable Development, it seemed essential, in view of the importance of science and technology and new and renewable sources of energy for sustainable development, that the relationship between the mandates of those bodies should be clearly prescribed.

As to the interim arrangements for inter-agency coordination, he emphasized that the establishment of the ACC task force was a purely temporary arrangement intended to facilitate an early and timely response to the new requirements for inter-agency coordination and cooperation. Once the task force completed its work, it would seem logical for adjustments to be made in the institutional arrangements to accommodate the decisions adopted at Rio.

As to the question of interim secretariat arrangements pending the adoption of arrangements at the forthcoming session of the General Assembly, he recalled that the 22 Professional posts allocated to the Conference secretariat by the regular budget had had to be increased threefold through secondment and with extrabudgetary resources. If those additional posts were lost during the interim period and the Conference staff was then further reduced, the capacity to ensure quality follow-up to the Conference would be significantly impaired.

With regard to the number and nature of the reports to be provided to the General Assembly, he said that the main report would be the report of the Secretary-General called for in paragraph 38.12 of Agenda 21 concerning the

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organizational modalities for the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The information requested on the proposed high-level advisory body and on staffing could be covered in that same report. He expected that it would be available in a timely fashion.

Mr. CHIRILA (Romania) requested further clarification of the proposed high-level advisory body.

Mr. EHLERS (Observer for Uruguay) wondered how, in practical terms the Commission on Sustainable Development could be the focal point of intergovernmental decision-making and also the principal forum for Agenda 21 implementation at the local, regional and gloabl levels.

Mr. MANZ (Observer for Switzerland) said that the follow-up to the Rio Conference posed a major challenge for the United Nations system. The proposed Commission on Sustainable Development should reinforce current efforts to restructure the economic and social activities of the United Nations and should be a forum for the exchange of information and experiences on national, regional and international policies relating to the follow-up of Agenda 21. Ultimately, it should define overall United Nations policy in the area of environment and development.

The Commission should meet annually for a period of two to three weeks and involve concerned non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scientific and the business circles in its work. The meetings should be held in Geneva, which had a responsible and active scientific community and where a great number of countries already maintained permanent missions. His Government therefore formally renewed its offer to host the secretariat of the Commission in Geneva and expressed its readiness to facilitate the establishment of the secretariat by providing the necessary infrastructure free of charge.

Mr. LICHEM (Austria) wondered what would be the relationship between the Commission's review function and the Economic and Social Council's coordination and policy role. Noting that reviewing 180 national reports would be a very time-consuming process, he suggested that there should be a system of sectoral or regional reviews, which would also enhance the role and responsibilities of the regional commissions.

(Mr. Lichem, Austria)

Secondly, noting that the secretariat's workload was bound to increase, since implementation required more staff than planning, he wondered whether funding would keep pace with the increasing workload. He also wondered what the relationship would be between the Commission and the financial institutions and what provision would be made for review of the funding.

Finally, since the Commission would also have a policy function, his delegation could foresee a possible conflict with the Commission's subsidiary role in relation to the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. Guerrero (Philippines), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. STRONG (Secretary-General, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), responding to the representative of Romania, said that the high-level advisory body he had in mind would be a group of eminent persons acting in their individual capacities such as had assisted in the preparations for UNCED. It might meet regularly for two or three years or on an ad hoc basis.

An extraordinarily rich array of resources was available for implementing Agenda 21: inputs to UNCED, national reports, sectoral analyses and the like. To review that material it would be necessary to take advantage of the expertise available within the United Nations system and outside, namely, from Governments and NGOs. Since the Commission's secretariat would be small, it would have to command the highest degree of respect and enlist the support of the various entities with which it worked.

His earlier statement that the Commission should be the main focal point followed from its role as an intergovernmental body. In order to do its job it must draw upon the continuing contributions of many agencies and must be seen by them as the focal point for the continuing review and evolution of Agenda 21. It must also be able to reach out to them in cooperative arrangements.

The offer by Switzerland to host the secretariat was most generous and Geneva would, indeed, be a very appropriate location; however, a very active presence would also be necessary in New York.

The relationship between the role of the Commission in implementing Agenda 21 and the function of the Economic and Social Council was a complex

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one. The Commission's review of Agenda 21 would be quite time-consuming and should be done in such a way as to facilitate the Council's work. The reviews themselves should be conducted on a national and regional basis; such exercises were already routinely carried out by the regional economic commissions. The representative of Austria was no doubt right to be concerned that tasks undertaken in support of the Commission would increase demands on the secretariat; however, he personally felt that the United Nations system could and would respond.

The relationship between the Commission and the financial institutions would be an interactive one. The financial institutions would certainly not take instructions from the Commission, but its policy review could not be effective unless it was undertaken in close consultation with those institutions. The United Nations system could influence the financial institutions to the extent that the latter respected the guidance provided by the Commission.

Regarding the concern that the Commission's future-oriented functions might usurp the role of the Economic and Social Council, he pointed out that while there was an element of policy-making, Governments had certainly intended the Commission to provide useful guidance. It would not dictate but merely illuminate the future, pointing up issues that should influence Governments' thinking.

Mr. KAARIA (Finland), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, agreed that the Rio Conference had on the whole been a remarkable success. The implementation of Agenda 21 and the integration of development and environmental concerns must take place at the local, national and regional levels with the support of the entire United Nations system. In order to ensure effectiveness, such support must be decentralized and flexible. The Commission on Sustainable Development was essential in order to provide guidance and coordination throughout the system and maintain the momentum achieved. In revitalizing the Council, account should be taken of the decisions by the Conference, particularly since the Commission would report to the Council. The Nordic countries underscored the need to ensure the financing necessary to implement those decisions and the Commission's important role with respect to their financial aspects.

Mr. KHAN (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, stressed that the General Assembly was the principal policy-making and evaluation body with regard to the follow-up to the Rio Conference. Within the framework of the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the Council, the Commission on Sustainable Development had a specific role to play in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of Agenda 21. In that connection, he stressed that the three new subsidiary bodies, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, the Committee on Natural Resources and the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development, had specific functions that could not in any way be assumed by the Commission on Sustainable Development. The work of those bodies must begin as soon as possible, particularly since the General Assembly had taken a decision to that effect. Lastly, he inquired whether any initial contacts had been made for the pledging conference to be held before the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

Mr. SERRATE (Observer for Bolivia) stressed the need to maintain the political momentum generated by the Rio Conference. Sustainable development had been recognized as a basic principle guiding the activities of the United Nations system. The secretariat of the Commission should be a small, well-defined body with high-level representation. The Commission should not compete with other bodies and should assume the general leadership role in the field of sustainable development. Lastly, his delegation, like many others, felt the need for the ongoing presence of Mr. Strong, who was an indispensable link between the developed and developing countries, in order to maintain the spirit of the Rio Conference.

Mr. GORELIK (Russian Federation) said that the recommendations put forward by Mr. Strong encouraged the hope that it would be possible to establish a forum for implementing the decisions taken at the Rio Conference. In that connection, it was essential to ensure clear coordination of the work of all international organizations both within and outside the United Nations system in implementing Agenda 21. He stressed that the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development should be a small, independent sub-division, which should make maximum use of the expertise of the Conference

(Mr. Gorelik, Russian Federation)

secretariat and be financed through savings achieved during the current reform of the United Nations Secretariat. It should be headed by a high-level official, who would report directly to the Secretary-General, and would carry out the important function of coordinating system-wide measures to implement the decisions taken at the Rio Conference and Agenda 21. Lastly, he inquired what Mr. Strong had meant by the broad-based review of the relationship between the Council and non-governmental organizations.

Ms. DOWSETT (Observer for New Zealand) agreed that the impetus generated by the Rio Conference must be maintained. The participatory process created by the Conference should be reflected in the operations of the Commission on Sustainable Development. She stressed the need to ensure the best possible interaction with non-governmental organizations in the fields of business, industry, environment and development, indigenous people and various other groups, such as those in the scientific and technological sectors. The Commission's activities should be open to the widest possible involvement on the part of the members of the international community. The Commission should also benefit from the participation and scrutiny of as many countries as possible and its meetings should be organized in such a way as to achieve that objective.

Mr. STRONG (Secretary-General, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) said that there had been no initial contacts or initiatives with regard to the pledging conference. Although his responsibilities would end when his contract expired in August, his commitment to the United Nations and the cause of sustainable development would continue.

The current arrangements governing accreditation of non-governmental organizations were frankly inadequate. The nature of such organizations and their relationship to the United Nations had changed immensely over the years, partly due to the tremendous proliferation of such organizations in developing countries. Many of them functioned on a less formal basis than those accredited to the Council and although some of them might not wish to be accredited to the Council, their contribution to United Nations activities was absolutely essential.

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A number of non-governmental organizations in the environmental field had budgets greater than that of UNEP. In the area of development, there was a vast amount of human and financial resources at the disposal of non-governmental organizations. It was therefore essential to incorporate those organizations into a framework where they could contribute to and be influenced by United Nations activities. Unless they saw the Organization as a leader in areas of concern to them, they would go their own way and the United Nations influence would be seriously diminished. A broad-based review of the modalities for participation by non-governmental organizations would reveal a great deal about the United Nations potential relationship with them in the future and would be extremely useful.

Mr. SUGANO (Japan) said that his delegation could not support any proposal to set up an independent and separate secretariat for the Commission on Sustainable Development, headed by an under-secretary-general, since that would undermine the Secretary-General's efforts to consolidate a number of bodies in the economic and social fields. The secretariat should be established within the Department of Economic and Social Development. Although his delegation appreciated the proposal made by Switzerland, it felt that the question of the location of the Commission's secretariat should be given careful consideration in the context of the overall functioning of the United Nations system. National reports were a very important part of the overall process begun at the Rio Conference and the secretariat should encourage the submission of such reports. It would be interesting to know how many countries had already submitted reports and how many were expected to do so.

Mr. ARELLANO (Mexico) supported the statement made by Mr. Strong with regard to the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the other measures envisaged. Mexico would express its views on the institutional arrangements to be made in that regard at the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

Ms. CASTAÑO (Colombia) said that her delegation would do likewise and inquired how Mr. Strong viewed more active participation by regional development banks in the follow-up to the Rio Conference.

Mr. WU Hai Long (China) agreed with the representative of Pakistan that the questions relating to the Rio Conference should be discussed in the General Assembly. He inquired whether the small-scale, independent secretariat as envisaged by Mr. Strong, would draw upon the resources of the United Nations system or be entirely separate.

Mr. STRONG (Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) replied that the secretariat would not be independent but should have a strong mandate and high-level status so that it could report directly to the Secretary-General. It should not be integrated into a body which itself had major programmatic and operational functions. Experience showed that when a United Nations structure with a major substantive function played a coordinating role, it was viewed with suspicion by other United Nations bodies with which it might be in competition. That would impede the secretariat's ability to carry out its coordinating function. The location of the secretariat was far less important than its attributes. It must have the professional competence, mandate and status to command the respect of the bodies with which it must cooperate. Otherwise, it would not be very effective, since it would not have funds to disburse.

At the Rio Conference, it had been recognized that the arrangements made, particularly those to support developing countries in the field of technology and finance, would begin modestly and would need to be nurtured in the follow-up process. If that process was not credible, the hopes of the developing countries in that regard would be disappointed. The secretariat would be answerable to the Secretary-General, and its structure should enable it to exercise a coordinating function, building on the positive experience gained at the Rio Conference and enlisting the support and participation of the entire United Nations system and the intergovernmental and non-governmental communities.

In response to the representative of Japan, he said that, to date, 168 countries had submitted reports, a remarkable endorsement of the Conference's importance, particularly since some of those countries had only recently gained statehood.

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The development banks had participated actively in the preparations for the Rio Conference and, as they constituted an invaluable resource, they should also be fully incorporated in the follow-up arrangements.

Mr. ORLIANGE (France) said that his delegation associated itself fully with the views expressed by the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Community and its member States, adding that France favoured Geneva as the site for the proposed unit to deal with follow-up activities.

Many important questions had already been resolved and he stressed the need to resist the temptation to turn the General Assembly into a rerun of that Conference.

He requested more information on the scope and mandate of the proposed advisory body and the expected date of publication of the report on the Conference.

Mr. GATHUNGU (Observer for Kenya) fully supported the views expressed by the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Group of 77. He requested further information on the relationship between the proposed secretariat (which Kenya saw as a unit rather than a secretariat) and ongoing operational activities at country level under UNDP programmes. Those activities were initiated on proposals originating from the countries themselves and he wondered how the proposed secretariat would establish the legitimacy of its operations in carrying out its own mandate and whether its functions would overlap with those of other agencies and organizations already involved in Agenda 21 activities.

He also asked for clarification of what was meant by national Agenda 21 programmes and, in particular, their relationship to UNDP country programmes.

His delegation was concerned that, if the new secretariat were given a strong mandate, sustainable development measures would be implemented according to a top-down model, whereby countries were merely required to obey instructions from above. He hoped that the proposed secretariat would not merely bring the road from Rio back to New York or Geneva.

Ms. TOMKINSON (Australia) asked when the report regarding interim arrangements would be available to delegations. In particular, she expressed the hope that any budgetary implications of the decision regarding the location of the secretariat would be made clear.

Mr. ATIF (Kuwait) asked what steps were being taken to avoid any duplication between the functions of the proposed Commission and those of the existing subcommittees of the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. VAN SCHAIK (Observer for the Netherlands) asked what would be the functions of the proposed secretariat during the transition period and whether voluntary funds were available to finance any necessary arrangements.

Noting that the Secretary-General of the Conference would be relinquishing his post the following month, he wondered whether he (the Secretary-General) would be present at the General Assembly to guide debate on that subject.

Mr. BAYTCHEV (Bulgaria) said that his delegation fully agreed with the views expressed by the Secretary-General of the Conference on the far-reaching political significance of the Rio Conference, and in particular Agenda 21, and he noted that sustainable development was vital to the success of the political process in Bulgaria. Since the proposed Commission would play a key role in the follow-up activities, its modalities should be determined by the General Assembly.

Mr. STRONG (Secretary-General, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) said, with reference to the proposed advisory body, that the creation of such a body had been suggested in Agenda 21 (E/1992/99, para. 38.18). In his statement he had in fact been referring to a more specific advisory panel on finance, the creation of which he considered of vital importance, particularly in view of the financial constraints which were likely to affect follow-up activities. The functions of that panel could be exercised by the high-level advisory board suggested in Agenda 21.

He had no information as yet on the state of the Secretary-General's report, but his secretariat stood ready to make whatever contribution it could to that report.

With regard to the apprehensions expressed by the representative of Kenya concerning the strong mandate of the secretariat, he insisted that there was nothing in the secretariat mandate as he envisaged it which would compromise the principle of UNDP service to Member States. The implementation of Agenda 21 was certain to increase the demands of Member States on the system and additional support would therefore be required.

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With regard to the reporting relationship, he assured the representative of Kenya that it would not follow the top-down model but would be a fully systemic process. Inputs had been received from countries, through their presentations at the Conference and through national and regional meetings, out of which a global programme, Agenda 21, had crystallized. That programme could be implemented only by those who had fashioned it: the States themselves, who would need the benefit of continuing interaction, such as the secretariat would provide, to give them the necessary benchmarks for their programmes.

Moreover UNDP country programmes were not the same as national Agenda 21 programmes. The latter resulted from the incorporation into countries' national programmes of those aspects of Agenda 21 which they considered relevant to their conditions and for whose implementation they might require additional assistance. There was therefore no conflict between Agenda 21 and UNDP country-level activities. The road from Rio would not lead back to New York or Geneva, but would branch into an extensive network, leading through all countries and enabling all actors in the process to communicate and cooperate in carrying out the massive undertaking of Agenda 21.

Replying to the representative of Australia, he said that, as the report in question was the responsibility of the budget division, it would be more appropriate for that division to report on its status. The budgetary implications of the proposals contained in the Secretary-General's report would be made clear.

The need to avoid duplication was a perennial problem affecting all areas of the system and could only be resolved by clearly defining the mandates and linkages of each of the bodies concerned. It was therefore vital to keep those mandates under constant review. At the same time, a certain amount of duplication at the margins, where bodies intersected but worked from different perspectives, could be useful and was even moderately desirable.

With regard to the transitional arrangements, he said that there was a vast amount of work under way on the follow-up activities and it was therefore impossible to make a clean break between the process of the Conference itself and the implementation of its decisions. The continued involvement of the

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small number of professional staff was vital. The Conference secretariat had originally operated with a full-time staff of more than 60; that number had already been drastically reduced and there was no justification for further reducing it to the point where it was only able to write reports. It would almost certainly be cheaper to maintain the current secretariat than to discontinue it and to start afresh.

In response to the final two questions put by the Observer for the Netherlands, he said that, while he did not have exact figures, not much was available in the form of voluntary funds and that, as for his involvement at the General Assembly, he was at the disposal of the Secretary-General.

The PRESIDENT said that, as Mr. Strong was making his last appearance in his capacity as Secretary-General of the Conference, it was appropriate to congratulate him on his work, which would serve as an inspiration to others, and to assure him that he would leave behind, in the poet Longfellow's phrase, "footprints in the sands of time".

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.